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NETRUNNER™

THE CARD GAME

AN EXCERPT FROM

STRANGE FLESH

Caprice had been intending to call Jinteki, but she didn't get the chance. Her desktop PAD chimed with an incoming call while she was still flicking through internal company archives as fast as she could assimilate them.

"Good day, Toshiyuki. How can I assist you?"

"You seem to be doing a little history research. I thought I should give you a call and confirm that everything was proceeding smoothly."

"I am conducting an interview on a case, Toshiyuki."

"Of course that's what you're doing, Caprice. You're interviewing Miss Tallie Perrault about those tech theft accusations she and her two friends made. We're fully aware of what you're doing, Caprice, although it would have been nice if you'd seen fit to stop by your office after you got the case and let us know yourself."

"If, uh, if you know the case I am working on, this, uh, these tech-theft allegations, then you already know that they are germane to the early days of our company," she was able to say after a moment. "I am reviewing what I can of our early intellectual property acquisitions to see what substance there is to this story." She firmed her shoulders slightly. "My charter for this role is to perform police duties with maximum effectiveness. My obligations as a detective certainly require me to confirm whether or not there is a case to answer here."

"Certainly," Toshiyuki said. "The NAPD is an important client, charged with essential civic duties. And Jinteki is committed to good corporate citizenship and a role in preserving our civil society."

"I apologize for any concern I may have caused you when I connected to the secure domain, but at present, I repeat that this is background and context research."

"Chairman Hiro has indicated a personal interest in this case," Toshiyuki said, the words coming out in a rush. The words sent little slivers of ice through Caprice's gut, but only for a moment. They only confirmed her suspicions, after all.

"I understood that the chairman's personal interest in all of my cases was a given," she said, as steadily as she could. That had been what she had been thinking to herself to keep herself calm ever since she had first heard the name in Tallie's memories. "The chairman has been intimately involved with my genotype project since its inception, as I understand it. I believe it was you who explained to me that it was his personal work on the early stages of the project that conceptualized and designed the gene sequence that provides my most useful characteristics."

"The chairman's office has said that your case records are to be flagged for his personal attention, Caprice."

"My case records are sealed for NAPD use only, barring a warrant from—"

"That's enough. You don't need to bring any formal records. You have an eidetic memory. I know, I'm the one who engineered it into you. You're going to tell us exactly what happened in this tech-theft case. Chairman Hiro has given very explicit instructions."

"But my responsibilities as a police officer…" Caprice heard her voice almost wailing.

"You don't have to worry about them," Toshiyuki said. "You're not a police officer, Caprice. You're police equipment. You're a prototype piece of equipment on loan. What's the difference between us getting you in here and seeing how you've been put to use, and Kinghammer fetching back a new model of riot-gun to do the same? Well? None. No difference at all, Caprice. Real people have responsibilities. I have responsibilities. Equipment has uses. Stop talking like a person." For a moment he looked like he was going to say something else, but then he leaned forward and hit something outside the display. He was angry enough that it took him three thumps until his hand actually found the key and killed the connection.

Caprice sat in her chair, looking around her office, wondering what to think. What was normal to think? Was this human distress? Would a human feel like this after being spoken to like that? Perhaps not. Perhaps feeling like this at all just meant she was equipment. Equipment not doing its job.

Broken clone.

Strange flesh.

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THE CARD GAME

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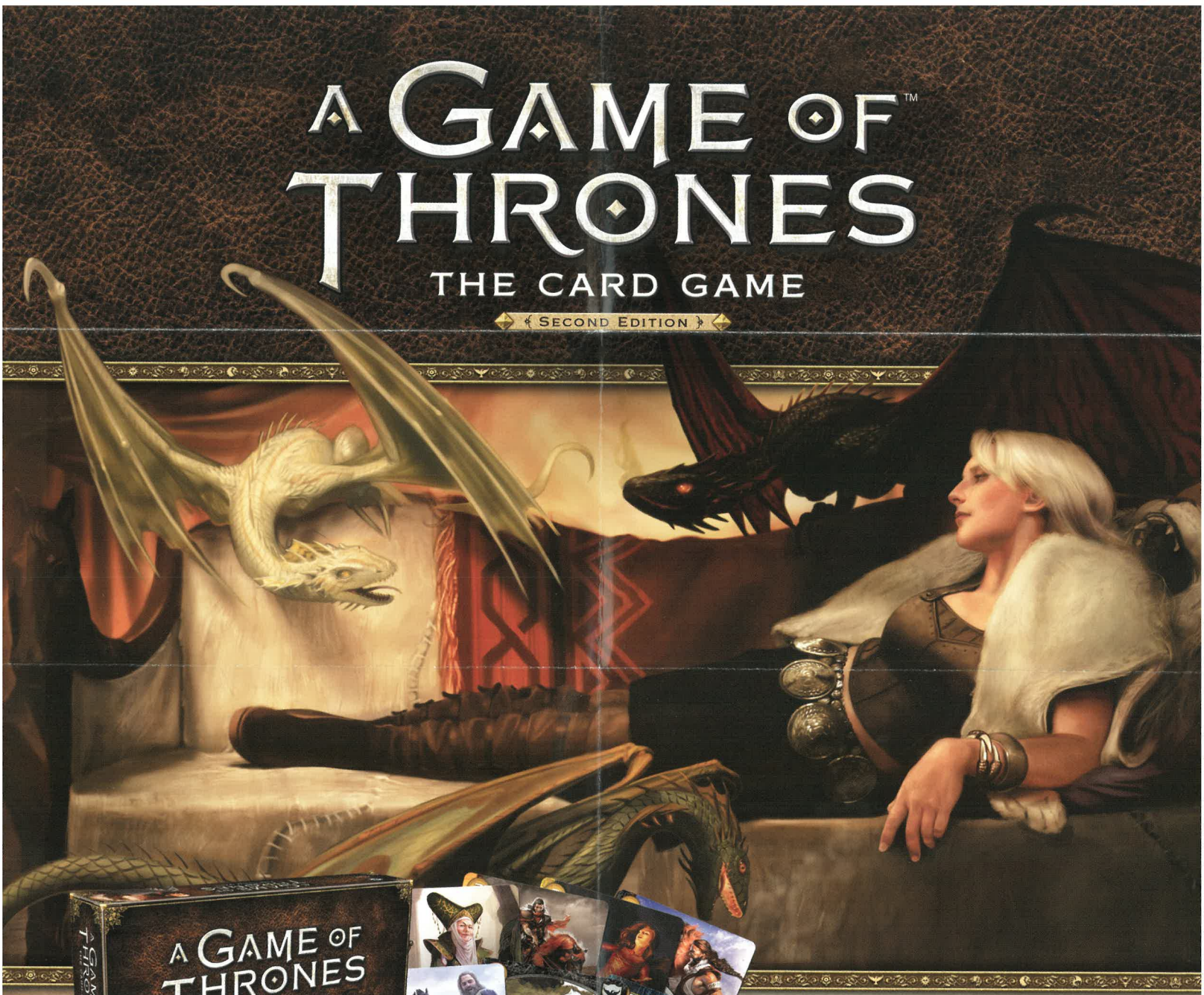

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